DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS AND PUBLIC GRIEVANCES OF THE MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES AND PENSIONS (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): (a) to (d) All Union Ministries/ Departments are required to spend atleast 10% of their Budget(s) on schemes/ projects for the benefit of the North-Eastern Region and Sikkim. Some Union Ministries/Departments have been specifically exempted from the requirement because of the location/scheme specific nature of the plan provision in their Budgets. Shortfalls in meeting this target are to be pooled in a Central Pool of Resources. Funds to the extent of Rs. 121.95 crores and Rs. 303.97 crores were identified for the Central Pool in respect of the years 1998-99 and 1999-2000 respectively against which releases were made for the various projects in the North-East and Sikkim.

A quick review has revealed that total expenditure on the North-East by the Central Ministries/Departments which was about 5.8% of Gross Budgetary Support for the year 1997-98 increased to about 7.5% during 1998-99, and it is expected to go up further during 2000-2001. Besides, to ensure that adequate Plan allocation is made for the North-East (and Sikkim), Ministries/Departments have been advised to indicate under a separate Head 10% of Plan allocation for the Annual Plan 2000-2001. Furthermore, the number of "exempted" Departments referred to above has been brought down from 19 to 8. Formally to improve the skills of the officers of the North East in project preparation and monitoring a workshop was recently organised in the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.

MEP for coir and coir products

1655. SHRI A. VIJAYA RAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES AND AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) whether the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) has recommended for the gradual phase out of M.E.P. of coir and coir products;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government have taken any action in this regard; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) to (d) The National Council

of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) has recommended that the Minimum Export Price (MEP) should be withdrawn in a phased manner. The matter has been considered and it has been decided that steps have to be initiated for progressive phasing out of the MEP in an appropriate manner particularly for the purpose of making the trade policy measures compatible with World Trade Organisation Rules. Accordingly, the Coir Board has withdrawn MEP from embellishments, powerloom products and geotextiles *with effect from* 11.1.2000.

Small Scale Industries in Assam

1656. SHRIMATI BASANTI SARMA: Will the Minister of SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES AND AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Small Scale Industries set up in the country particularly in the State of Assam as on 31.1.2000;

(b) if so, the details of fund proposed, sanctioned and allotted by Government for the purpose during this period; and

(c) the steps being taken by Government to set up Small Scale Industries in Assam during the year 2000-2001?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) There were 24.05 lakh registered small scale industrial units in the country by the end of year 1999 (latest available) including 23,114 units in Assam. Registration data from States are received on quarterly basis.

(b) The details of funds proposed, sanctioned and allotted by the Government for the purpose are as under:

(i) An amount of Rs. 4,304 crore has been provided as the 9th Plan outlay to the Ministry of SSI & ARI for development and promotion of small and cottage industries. During the year 1997-98 and 1998-99, actual expenditure incurred under the plan schemes was Rs. 735.10 crore and Rs. 708.30 crore respectively. The outlay for the year 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 are Rs. 738.75 crore and 920.00 crore respectively. Funds for promotion of small scale industries are not allocated State-wise.